Actual Sho
Chess Pieces

Reflections

Jeffrey Hunt
September 26 2025

This Chess Piece photo captures a fleeting moment from *Actual Sho*—the 1987 production by George Coates Performance Works, which premiered at the Theater der Welt Festival - Stuttgart. I believe the image was ultimately cut from the show—possibly an outtake.

Looking back, I now think these images—part of a larger sequence—may have been taken during our preview at the Palace of Fine Arts Theatre in San Francisco. That would explain the slightly off-center framing: the central view was occupied by stage management and the scenic projectors set up in the house.

At the lower left, you can see Sean Kilcoyne illuminated in an extraordinary amber-brown light. That color came from a scrap of original theatrical gel I had carried with me from the University of Washington. Before working with George, I had been involved with large-scale Pani projection design with the UW opera department as well as a number of other productions. This particular gel—long since obsolete—was brittle, antique, and nearly impossible to replace. I salvaged it from the scrap heap, and it resurfaced here, as well as earlier in *Edifice Next* paired with the turquoise blue. In dim settings, the effect was vibrant, almost electric—one of those once-in-a-lifetime color combinations.

What amazes me still is the precision of the lighting. Sean stands only a foot or two from the projection screen, yet there is no flare, no washout—only the crisp shadow of his binoculars. The actors move across the stage, bathed in light, but nothing else is contaminated by the spill. The lighting is difficult to comprehend. It was a magic trick—not only in its design, but in the sheer collaboration it required to pull it off. The whole production was greater magic, really. The sum, far more astonishing than any of the parts.